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ABSTRACT

Presented are sample workshop strategies for use with parents of exceptional children in helping them clarify personal values and recognize ways to facilitate personal growth in their children. Briefly described are such approaches as an adaptation of the "Twenty Things I Love to Do" strategy; the "Things I Like about Myself and My Child" excercise; and an activity in which parents share aloud something they are proud of. In addition to helping parents see themselves as capable and effective persons who can significantly enhance their child's personal growth, values clarification strategies are noted to help parents realize that their child's limited "success" in school does not preclude healthy personal, social, and vocational adjustment. (SB)

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WORKING WITH PARENTS:

A VALUES CLARIFICATION APPROACH

Mini-Session

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54th Annual Convention of the

International Council for Exceptional Children

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WORKING WITH PARENTS: A VALUES CLARIFICATION APPROACH

An approach to helping parents clarify some of their personal values while recognizing ways in which they may facilitate the personal growth of their children will be presented in this mini-workshop. Session participants will be involved in values clarification exercises which have been used successfully with parents of children with learning disabilities and mental retardation in urban, rural and suburban settings. Specific replicable techniques which may be used singularly, in combination, or in relation to other activities will be presented. Many activities have been adapted from those outlined by Simon, Howe and Kirschenbaum (1972). Activities described in this paper provide a sample of strategies which will be simulated in the actual session.

Values clarification strategies might be used with parents of children who are exceptional for the general purposes of (a) helping parents see themselves as capable and effective persons who can significantly enhance their child's personal growth and (b) helping parents deal with the "school emphasis syndrome," recognizing that their child's limited "success" in school does not preclude healthy personal, social and vocational adjustment.

To help parents identify personal activities which are valued and recognize that individuals learn about many things they value outside the school environment, an adaptation of the "Twenty Things I Love to Do" strategy (Simon et al., 1972) might be used. Ask parents to quickly list twenty things they really love to do on a piece of paper, emphasizing that their list may include such simple things as soaking in a hot tub or talking to a friend.

Next, ask parents to: (1) put a "P" by each activity on their list they prefer to do with other people and an "A" by those they prefer to do alone;

(2) put a "$" by each activity which costs over $3.00 each time they engage in it; (3) put an "M" by all the activities they believe their own mother would have had on her list when she was their age; (4) put an "F" by all the items their father might have had on his list; (5) put an "IQ" by all the items they believe they would really enjoy more if they were smarter; (6) an "S" by all the things they were specifically taught to do in school; (7) an "Att" by all the items they would enjoy more if they were prettier or more handsome (Attractive) than they are now; and (8) put the approximate date of the last time they engaged in the activity.

Next, ask parents to look over their paper carefully, reflect on it and finish stem sentences of "I learned that I . . . .;" "I was surprised that I . . . .;" or "I reaffirmed that I . . . .". As participants share their discoveries, some of the following statements are common: "I learned that money and intelligence are really not the most important things in my life;" "I learned that I learned much of what I do from either my father or mother;" ". . . . that I learned a lot of important things somewhere besides in school;" "I was surprised that I am now doing the things I love to do; sometimes I feel that I need a vacation to do the things I love."

The leader might emphasize that we sometimes forget that all people can have things they love to do and that through engaging in activities they enjoy, parents are teaching their children some very important things. As a parent of a child who may create extra demands of time and attention, one needs to remember that doing enjoyable things is not only necessary for one's sanity, but also important to a child's learning. Going fishing or sitting in the woods with a child may be more important than drilling him on his addition facts!

To aid parents in identifying ways in which they value their children while recognizing means of enhancing their child's self-concept, a "Things I like about myself and my child" exercise might be used. Ask parents to write three (3) specific things they like about themselves. Request that they share their list with a small group of 4-5 people. As people are often embarrassed to talk about their own good qualities, the leader might elicit from group members how they felt about sharing their list with others. It might be pointed out that our embarrassment is a "value" we've learned from our society -- i.e., don't brag on yourself. "If you have to say something about yourself, say something bad." Next, have parents write three (3) things they like about their child. Request that these be shared in the small group. A follow-up discussion might point out that many self-attributes and qualities admired in children -- e.g., happy, loving, good sense of humor, determined, good listener, etc. -- are basic human qualities which are not changed by a "handicap." We need to recognize that the valuing of such qualities can allow us to be happier with ourselves and with children who are exceptional. If, however, the things we like most about ourselves are that we're pretty, very intellectual, have a prestigious job, etc., then possibly our personal values will make it difficult to accept or appreciate the child who is perhaps not "pretty" (by the standards we've been taught by the media), not "intellectual," or who many never hold a "prestigious" job. The leader might suggest that because of the "school emphasis syndrome," a child may not have the opportunity to be appreciated for the qualities we most admire in him. How often do we say "You are a "loving child and you make me very happy" or "I love the way you work so hard without giving up" or "You have a wonderful laugh"? Parents may wish to make

"Self Contracts" (Simon et al, 1972) to let their child know some things they appreciate about him/her.

The "Things I like about myself and my child" activity might be followed with a "Proud Whip" (Simon et al., 1972). Ask parents to share aloud something they are proud of in relation to (1) being a parent, (2) their community activities, (3) their child, and/or (4) money. The "Proud Whip" exercise gives people an opportunity to publicly affirm some of their values as well as creating a positive feeling in the group.

A number of strategies outlined by Simon et al. (1972) have been modified by the author and used with groups of parents, including "Values Grid," "Values Voting," "Forced Choice," "Values Continuum," "Values Whip," "Privacy Circles," "Rank Order" (Appednix A), "Alternatives Search" (Appendix B), "Brainstroming," "Consequences," "Values in Action," "Personal Coat of Arms," "Life Line," and others. It is suggested that leaders interested in the use of values clarification techniques study suggested references and then begin to develop strategies which suit purposes of a specific session or a particular group of parents. The author has found that familiarity with a number of strategies leads to increased versatility in the use of values clarification techniques. The usefulness of values clarification is obviously not limited to parents of exceptional children. The group leader or teacher who begins to develop a repretoire of strategies will continually find new applications. As mentioned earlier, values clarification techniques may be used singularly, as in a group warm-up or to clarify a specific concept or idea, or in a number of combinations. An in-depth use of strategies may develop stronger, clearer and more consistently acted-upon values. If we define "values" as the criteria we use for making choices or decisions the development of conscious, strong values becomes a critical concern -- for parents of children who are exceptional as well as the professionals who work with them.

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APPENDIX A

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RANK ORDER

Which do you consider most important for your child?

_____ Learning to read
_____ Learning to like himself and get along with others
_____ Learning to move about independently in the neighborhood and/or community
_____ Learning math facts to 100

Which do you feel is most important?

_____ Developing good educational services for all children in the community
_____ Deinstitutionalizing handicapped persons
_____ Developing a strong community system of support services for handicapped persons
_____ Improving existing institutions

If an adolescent student has none of the following skills, which would you consider most important?

_____ Teaching the student to add and subtract
_____ Teaching the student to ride a public bus
_____ Teaching the student good grooming practices
_____ Teaching the student to prepare a meal

Whom would you prefer to be with (or marry)? A person with

_____ High intellectual ability
_____ Nice warm personality
_____ Sex appeal
_____ Prestige in the community

Which would you like most to see?

_____ Integration of races and nationalities
_____ Separate nations for all races
_____ Separate areas within existing communities for each race or nationality

Which would you like most to see?

_____ Well-equipped special schools
_____ Integration of exceptional children in regular schools and classes (with adequate support services)
_____ Well-designed and equipped institutions (residential/education)
_____ Exclusion of children who cannot adjust to the "regular" classroom

Which do you feel has the most serious implications for your child or others who are exceptional?

_____ Amniocentresis and the abortion of fetuses
_____ The building of large institutions
_____ The building of special school facilities
_____ The emphasis on "least restrictive environments" in providing services

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APPENDIX B

ALTERNATIVE ACTIONS SEARCH

1

You are at a public performance at a local theater. At intermission the director urges everyone to subscribe for the next season right away, as it will take a long time to respond to subscription requests. In explaining the time needed, the director says that "his actors are not retarded." What would you do?

2

In your voluntary association you have actively worked to avoid the use of financial appeals to the public which play on sympathy and pity, portraying handicapped people as children who are "pitiful," "helpless," "totally dependent on the good will of others," "cute," etc. Your local television station is planning a marathon broadcast to raise money. A "Follies" by children from a special school for the mentally retarded and dancing and singing by children with physical disabilities is being planned. What might you do?

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